

When the Temperatures Fall, Protect Your Pipes

Falling winter temperatures are potentially hazardous to your home's plumbing. Pipes located on outside walls and those in basements and crawl spaces are especially vulnerable. If they freeze, they can burst and lead to extensive damage and expensive repairs.

The Department of Public Works offers the following suggestions to keep pipes intact and water running:

- **Water meters** - Wrap indoor water meters located in unheated areas, such as a crawl space, with foam insulation or heat tape. Check your meter periodically to ensure it doesn't have cracks or leaks.

If you have an outdoor meter pit, make sure the lid isn't broken or missing. The top of the meter pit lid should be level with the ground to prevent cold from penetrating on the side. Install a layer of insulation just below the meter pit lid.

Check to make sure the shut-off valves to your water meter are working properly so you can shut off the water in case a pipe bursts. Mark the valves with a prominent tag and be sure everyone in the house knows where the valves are and how to operate them in an emergency.

- **Eliminate drafts** - All crawl-space vents and doors should be closed, and broken or cracked basement windows should be repaired. Make sure that basement doors and windows form a tight seal when closed to keep out cold air.
- **Insulate pipes** - Insulating pipes in unheated areas of your home, including the crawl space, is inexpensive insurance against ruptured pipes. You can find good pipe-wrapping materials at hardware or building-supply stores.
- **Leave faucet running** - If you've experienced frozen pipes in the past when temperatures stayed near zero, keep a trickle of water running continuously from a cold-water tap. This will ensure that the water keeps flowing and the pipes don't burst. Keeping sink vanity or cabinet doors open will let warm air circulate around pipes located against outside walls.